



DOCUMENTERS

## When 'relentlessly local' goes global



by Detroit Documenters  
March 26, 2024



Hey hey, Detroit,

We're welcoming spring by making changes! Look for this newsletter to hit your inbox on Wednesday mornings starting next week. We're also moving Documenters office hours to Thursday afternoons beginning next week.

Detroit Documenters and Outlier Media exist to serve Detroiters, full stop. We've even been called "**relentlessly local**" by the national media. Still, we get fired up when international audiences take an interest in what we're building together.

Last week, Outlier accepted the **International Award for Local Media** in Barcelona, which was a nice surprise. And next month, Detroit Documenters coordinators Lynelle and Noah will speak at the **International Journalism Festival** in Perugia, Italy. Cities and towns all over the world need more transparency and healthier civic life, so we're excited to discuss Documenters' special assignments with journalists from around the globe. We should all be proud that our community of practice inspires so many people.

Back to what we need to do to keep things here at home running well. The City of Detroit is running a **housing survey** to gather information in order to better support residents with disabilities.

We have one more week left of budget hearings, and together with BridgeDetroit, we're reporting on all of them. Check out the **complete rundown**.

If you've been following these budget hearings, you may have heard Detroit City Council President Mary Sheffield saying some items will be "added to executive session." Councilmembers hold executive sessions after the public hearings end to deliberate. The sessions are public and provide an opportunity for the council to make amendments to the proposed budget before approving it.

In their regular session last week, City Council approved \$19.5 million in contracts to add surveillance technology to the city's freeways in an effort to crack down on violent crime. The council is also getting ready to vote on an ordinance designed to thwart human trafficking in the city.

The Highland Park City Council (finally) did finalize an agreement with the Great Lakes Water Authority and **appointed an interim treasurer**.

Keep reading for the full rundown on meetings covered last week around Detroit. Here's what Documenters are looking into the week to come:

- 3/25/2024 **Wayne County Art Institute Authority**
- 3/26/2024 **Detroit City Council, Formal Session**
- 3/26/2024 **Detroit Land Bank Authority, Board of Directors**
- 3/27/2024 **Wayne County Community College District, Board of Trustees**
- 3/28/2024 **Detroit Housing Commission, Board of Commissioners**
- 3/28/2024 **Detroit City Council Budget Hearings: Board of Review / Office of Inspector General**
- 3/28/2024 **Detroit City Council Budget Hearings: Ombudsman / Department of Public Works**
- 3/28/2024 **Detroit Board of Police Commissioners**
- 3/28/2024 **Detroit Transportation Corp., Board of Directors**

"If I find that there are landlords that aren't even registering, we're going to hit them with a lot of tickets."

—David Bell, director of Detroit's Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department, at a budget hearing

## Spotlight

***Meet Marguerite Maddox — the Detroiter championing mobility rights, one city meeting at a time***

by Laura Herberg



Marguerite Maddox, 68, prefers to ride the QLine over the bus when she has time because she finds it easier to board with her rolling walker. Photo credit: Laura Herberg

If you've attended a public meeting in Detroit, you've likely heard Marguerite Maddox speak. She's been making her voice heard on issues ranging from sidewalk repair to how well bus drivers are driving for more than a decade.

[Read the story.](#)

## Public Meetings Report

### Budget

Councilmembers heard from the Building, Safety Engineering, and Environment Department (BSEED) and the Civil Rights, Inclusion and Opportunity Department (CRIO) in back-to-back budget hearings.

Councilmembers were concerned about code enforcement at BSEED. Director David Bell said BSEED holds property owners accountable through ticketing, but according to the Department of Appeals, the **collection rate on blight tickets in 2023** was only 16%.

Similarly, councilmembers were concerned businesses aren't meeting a **2021 executive order** requiring **certain publicly funded construction projects** to have 51% of their workers be Detroit residents. CRIO Deputy Director Tenika Griggs confirmed that on average, closer to 22% of workers in these construction projects have been Detroiters. Griggs said construction sites that fail to meet the hiring requirements receive fines but aren't shut down.

Councilmembers questioned whether thousands of dollars in fines is a strong enough deterrent. Councilmember Coleman Young II said "bad actors" will merely view the tickets and fines as a cost of doing business.

*3/20/2024 Detroit City Council, Budget Hearings: BSEED; CRIO, **documented** by Amy Senese and Tyrone Anderson*

Both the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) and the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) outlined ambitious plans during Friday's budget hearings while seeking to reassure City Council that progress was underway.

DWSD has **moved into Phase 2** of the **Basement Backup Protection Program** and the replacement of lead service lines continues, but the **Brightmoor Stormwater Improvement Project** remains bogged down in land ownership issues. The department also expressed frustrations with customers not paying for service or participating in the **10/30/50 Payment Plan**.

DDOT highlighted the **increase in funding** to hire 117 more bus drivers, the opening of the Jason Hargrove Transit Center at the former Michigan State Fairgrounds site and the installation of bus shelters. Safety remains a concern, with Interim Executive Director Michael Staley saying **preventable accidents occur** with DDOT buses at rates three times higher than the national standard.

Councilmembers were generally supportive of the agency, but they raised concerns with inaccurate bus tracking and an app that makes purchasing tickets difficult. They also questioned a lack of uniformity in

bus signs.

3/22/2024 Detroit City Council Budget Hearings: DWSD and DDOT, **documented** by **Perry Sylvester and Shiva Shahmir**



## Politics

**3/18/2024 Highland Park City Council:** Councilmembers approved the final settlement agreement resolving Highland Park's outstanding water debt. The council also appointed Lisa Stolarski temporarily to the position of city treasurer and scheduled a **special primary election on Aug. 6** for the position.

**Documented** by **Amy Senese and Jen David**

For more updates on Highland Park, watch Mayor Glenda McDonald's **2024 State of the City Address**.

**3/19/2024 Detroit City Council, Formal Session:** City Council approved spending \$19.5 million from a state grant to fund **contracts for surveillance technology** intended to mitigate violent crimes on Detroit freeways.

**Documented** by **Meghan Rutigliano and Shannon Mackie**

For more on City Council, check out **Malachi Barrett's City Council Notebook** at BridgeDetroit.

## Education

**3/19/2024 Detroit Public Schools Community District, Regular Board Meeting:** Board members spent more than two hours in closed session prior to hearing public comment. Several commenters appeared

to have left by the time they were called on. The district will not pursue an investigation into the principal at Thirkell Elementary-Middle School.

**Documented by Amber Umscheid and Zaara Noor**

**Read more in Detour Detroit** for more information on the investigation into the principal at Thirkell.

## Transportation

**3/20/2022 Wayne County Airport Authority (WCAA), Board of Directors:** Board members quickly approved contracts. Tadarial Sturdivant, the authority's senior vice president of public safety, said the Detroit Metro Airport Fire Department responded to 9% more calls last year than in 2022, and the Detroit Metro Airport Police Department responded to 25% more calls last year than in 2021.

**Documented by A J Johnson and Nathaniel Eichenhorn**

## Policing

**3/21/2024 Detroit Board of Police Commissioners:** The board asked the police department for a missing persons report and approved promotions of several police officers to higher ranks. Commissioners also hired two new investigators for the board, pending background checks, and reposted job listings for six more.

**Documented by Gina McPherson and Pamela Taylor**

For more on the Board of Police Commissioners, check out the **latest BOPC Watch**.

## Question of the Week

***Did the BOPC mess up — or did we?***

In **last week's newsletter**, we told you that the March 14 meeting of the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners ended in the middle of a seconded motion with Vice Chair Tamara Smith saying she would not entertain a vote. Smith, acting as chair at the time, said the motion was out of order. It seemed improper to us, but at the March 21 meeting, Board Parliamentarian Frances Jackson set the record straight.

"Neither the making nor the seconding of a motion places that before the assembly," Jackson said. "Only when the chair says it is moved and seconded does that put that motion as pending."



Jackson said a chair can choose not to entertain a vote if they think the motion is out of order.

## Get Involved

### *Upcoming events and opportunities*



We're back with a freshly-curated list of ways to get involved, Detroit! Learn more about **cooperative models for small business** at a free neighborhood workshop. If dollar bills are what you're after, there's a **\$10,000 paid fellowship** available to reporters and freelancers. Need something more permanent? There's a **full-time, remote job at the Documenters Network!** More interested in a casual hang? Join Outlier staff for **volunteer opportunities** or even **coffee and tea**.

Documenters have lots of upcoming ways to participate: Get **professional development tips** from an industry pro, join Docs from around the country for a network-wide **fact-checking workshop** hosted by our very own Dan Ignacio, engage in some **assignment talk over dinner** with Lynelle and Noah, and register for an April workshop where we can meet with the Grand Rapids Documenters to learn how the **state budget affects our cities**.

**See opportunities**

*If you have an opportunity you would like to share, email us at **documenters@outliermedia.org**.*

*This edition of the Detroit Documenters newsletter was written by Outlier Media's Lynelle Herndon and Noah Kincade, and Documenters Amber Umscheid, Meghan Rutigliano, and Perry Sylvester.*